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Summary record of the 12th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 19 October 2004, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Kyaw Tint Swe ..... (Myanmar)
later: Mr. Calderón (Vice Chairman) ..... (Ecuador)

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* Items which the Committee has decided to consider together.

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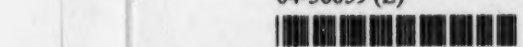

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 78: Questions relating to information (A/59/21, A/59/221 and Corr.1)

Agenda item 109: Programme planning (A/59/6 (Programme 23: Public information) and A/59/16, chap. II, sect. C, Prog. 23)

1. **The Chairman** invited Mr. Shashi Tharoor, the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, to introduce the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information (A/59/221 and Corr.1).

2. **Mr. Tharoor** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information) said that public information was not extraneous, as many people believed, but a critically important element of the success of the United Nations. The task of the Department of Public Information (DPI) was to convey to the world a sense of the Organization, and its values and issues. That was not an easy task, and the Department was continuing to hone its communications skills and sharpen its focus, using new information and communication technology (ICT), and forging closer partnerships with civil society. The Secretary-General's report (A/59/221) presented a broad overview of the significant results achieved between July 2003 and June 2004.

3. In the aftermath of the Security Council's disagreements on Iraq, a loss of faith in the United Nations had occurred; the polls had not been good, and the global attitudes survey taken by the Pew Research Center had given the United Nations low ratings both in the United States and abroad. Recently, there had been a spate of media attacks on the integrity and leadership of the Organization, including unsubstantiated allegations of corruption in the Oil-for-Food Programme, and muddled criticism related to events in Darfur. Such events had driven home the need to speak loudly, clearly and often about what the United Nations did and why. Public information was essential in order to maintain the support needed to fulfil the Organization's mandates; it also had an impact on the security of staff, particularly those in the field.

4. The Department's objectives remained unchanged, but the challenges it faced had grown; it had learned, in view of shrinking resources and expanding mandates, that it must target its messages and prioritize its options. Recently, the Department had developed a number of new and innovative ways to reach more people. An initiative entitled "Ten stories the world should hear more about" had been launched because too much attention had been concentrated on events in Iraq, to the detriment of all other issues on the global agenda. In consultation with other departments in the United Nations Secretariat, the Department had come up with ten stories on subjects that were not getting enough media attention, including Ugandan child soldiers, South African AIDS orphans, the international help needed by the Central African Republic, and the work being done to promulgate a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities. The full list could be found at www.un.org/events/ten stories. He was sure the Committee understood how extremely hard it was to muster resources and sustained political will to resolve issues and problems that people and politicians knew nothing about.

5. The Department had conducted a concerted promotional campaign, including placing op-eds and interviews in newspapers and magazines, and on radio and television. The response had been encouraging. Articles had appeared in such publications as *The International Herald Tribune*, the *South China Morning Post*, *Corriere della Sera*, and *Die Furche*, as well as in Egyptian and Congolese news venues, and on BBC, RTL Dutch TV, PBS and CNN — a good start. On World Press Day in 2005, the Department would launch another Top 10 list. In the meantime, Member States might wish to discuss the list with journalists and editors, and might suggest that they watch for the next instalment.

6. The Department had learned that by being innovative, it could find ways to reach wider audiences. It had, for example, reoriented its approach towards other departments within the Secretariat, in order to view them as clients to whom information services were provided, and was now better equipped to prepare global strategies. It was a measure of success that departments now routinely included information considerations in planning their work. Since the communication media were mainly interested in stories of conflict, the Department had devoted special attention to focused briefings for journalists on development issues. It was continuing to press the

media with respect to the Millennium Development Goals, but was also speaking directly to the public, and had placed the Goals at the centre of the next annual DPI/NGO Conference. At the previous annual conference, it had asked 3,000 representatives of NGOs from 69 countries to focus on how civil society could promote the Goals, and had set up a series of communication and networking systems to intensify interest around the world, including webcasting the event and running simultaneous conferences at United Nations information centres in Dakar, Asunción and Moscow, as well as at the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in Santiago. In partnership with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, it had created a chart showing the progress made in implementing the Goals by region, using the colours of the traffic light. In addition, the Department's Cyberschoolbus was working with European Schoolnet to develop a Goals web portal for youth and had created a full-colour map to highlight a major Asian highway initiative called "the new Silk Road".

7. Along with UNAIDS and the Kaiser Family Foundation, the Department was managing the Secretary-General's Global Media AIDS Initiative, a partnership with over 20 major global media companies to increase programming on HIV/AIDS issues. It had commenced a three-month trial run with The NewsMarket, an Internet news service that would distribute United Nations videos to television stations, and was producing, in partnership with UNICEF, a daily 10-minute package for distribution by satellite to television newsrooms. In addition, the *UN Chronicle* was now available in six official languages; students and teachers were its primary readers. A survey had shown that 90 per cent felt that the magazine improved their understanding of the Organization. The Department had launched an Unlearning Intolerance programme in 2004: day-long interactive seminars that engaged civil society leaders and a wider audience in discussions of how intolerance could be combated through education and example. The first had focused on anti-Semitism; the next would deal with Islamophobia.

8. DPI was continuing its work with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, and together they were developing a comprehensive information strategy to increase awareness among States Members of the surge in the demand for peacekeeping and the need for resources for logistical support, well-trained troops and civilian police. DPI was participating in the assessment of peacekeeping missions and strengthening its support of their information components. Together with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, it had initiated a weeklong training programme for public information officials.

9. As part of its new emphasis on evaluation, the Department had defined measurable indicators for work carried out in each of its subprogrammes, and intended to better gauge what worked and to fix what did not. Although a results-based framework called for monitoring the response to media stories, unfortunately, using external media monitoring and analysis companies was too costly. Since the only viable option was building in-house capacity to monitor and analyse media, the Department had sought the assistance of private sector partners in developing training modules to increase its capacity in that area. It had squeezed a tight budget to provide training to staff in audience research and evaluation techniques; 90 per cent of its programme managers had attended the workshops. The Department was in the second year of a three-year project to institute an internal mechanism for performance management.

10. Regrettably, the cost of using global public opinion polls was also prohibitive. The Department had had some success in finding partners willing to provide that service on a pro bono basis. A polling organization known as Zogby International had agreed to include six questions relating to the Millennium Development Goals in a poll covering countries of the Middle East. Half of those polled in Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, and less than a third of those polled in Morocco, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates had revealed a favourable view of the United Nations. Most respondents had not given the United Nations credit for any significant improvements in poverty reduction or primary education. Only a third of those polled in Jordan and Lebanon had given the Organization credit for its efforts to combat HIV/AIDS; that figure was 40 per cent in Saudi Arabia.

11. The Department was working to build a response to the decreased support for the United Nations in the Arab world, and to improve public understanding of the Organization there. It had held a meeting of regional information specialists to work on a strategic communications framework that was now being implemented. In addition, it had established a focal

point for Arab media, which had expanded the audience there, in particular by disseminating key statements and other materials in Arabic through the United Nations information centres.

12. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library, under a new head, was in the process of developing a more responsive, user-focused service and was taking the lead in the Steering Committee for the Modernization and Integrated Management of United Nations Libraries in giving the libraries a new strategic direction. Already, a common web gateway to all United Nations libraries and a documentation access programme had been set up, and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) library had been designated a common library for all United Nations offices in Nairobi.

13. One of the yardsticks of success cited by the Secretary-General in his report (A/59/221) was the number of pages viewed by visitors to the United Nations web site, sorted by language and, indeed, some of the language sites had registered truly phenomenal growth. While three-quarters of all the pages viewed were still in English, the gap was gradually shrinking, and there was a constant addition of material to the web site in the other official languages, although much still needed to be done to achieve parity.

14. In the meantime, there had been a series of innovations aimed at greater multilingualism: the United Nations News Centre now worked in several languages and, drawing upon the linguistic competence of News and Media Division staff, the very popular e-mail service should be available in all languages by March 2005; the Department was now able to produce several language versions of its daily news bulletin posted on the News Centre online portal; webcasting should be available in all languages by the end of the year, and speedy rebroadcasts over the web site were now done in one additional language as well; accessibility of the web site to users with disabilities was also being enhanced. It should be noted, however, that financial constraints were hampering such efforts at multilingualism, and the hiring freeze had prevented recruitment of necessary staff to provide General Assembly coverage and the production of press releases and other material.

15. Some progress had been made on the rationalization of the network of United Nations information centres. It was too soon, however, to assess the effectiveness and impact of the new Regional United Nations Information Centre, replacing nine Western European information centres. A cautious approach was being taken, in consultation with the Member States concerned and in consideration of the merits of each situation, to introducing changes elsewhere. Unfortunately, the totally unexpected reduction of the operational budget of the information centres at the recommendation of the Fifth Committee had deprived the information centres in developing countries of the benefit they were to have received from the savings achieved through the scaling-down of operations in Western Europe. Moreover, rising costs and the impact of that overall budget reduction had affected the ability of all information centres — already the poor relative of the United Nations family — to carry out meaningful outreach and programme activities, and that might force the closure of a number of centres. The Department was counting on Member States to argue for greater financial support that would re-energize the information centres, upgrade their facilities, and put the rationalization process back on track.

16. The Department would welcome the Fourth Committee's review of its proposed strategic framework for 2006-2007, as recommended by the Committee for Programme and Coordination. It had been approved almost without revision by the Committee on Information, whose views were reflected in its report (A/59/21) and in paragraphs 33 to 40 of that Committee's draft resolution B.

17. In 2005, Member States would debate the report of the high-level panel examining the entire architecture of the international system built up since 1945, and would also review the Millennium Development Goals. Thus, the Organization's sixtieth anniversary year would be a crucial one, during which it contemplated renewal, and during which the importance of effective public information would continue to grow.

18. **Ms. Miller** (Jamaica), speaking as Rapporteur of the Committee on Information, introduced the report of the Committee on Information on its twenty-sixth session (A/59/21), which had been adopted unanimously by the Committee. The report highlighted events such as World Press Freedom Day, commemorated on 3 May each year, and the inclusion of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Switzerland as members of the Committee, bringing

total membership to 102 Member States. It described the work of the Committee in relation to issues such as the reform of DPI, freedom of the press and of speech, coordination between the Committee on Information and DPI, the importance of the United Nations web site, the role of information in peacekeeping and rationalization of the United Nations information centres.

19. The report also contained two draft resolutions, entitled "Information in the service of humanity" and "United Nations public information policies and activities", which included references to the World Summit on the Information Society, the new programme priorities for DPI, the role of information in peacekeeping, strengthening of dialogue among civilizations and the culture of peace as a means of enhancing understanding among nations. They also included references to the work of the news services, the United Nations web site and library services and outreach services.

20. **Mr. Chowdhury** (Bangladesh), speaking as Chairman of the Committee on Information, stressed the importance of DPI as the public voice of the Organization and welcomed the close partnership between the Department and the Committee, leading to a broader dialogue between the two. The major structural overhaul of DPI had begun to yield concrete and positive results; use of available technologies had, for example, become more strategic, the messages transmitted were sharper and the audiences targeted better defined. As a result of its emphasis on a culture of evaluation, the Department was better equipped to measure the results of public information and communication activities.

21. The Department nevertheless continued to face challenges in its efforts to rationalize the network of United Nations information centres, caused in part by the lack of resources as a result of actions by the Fifth Committee as well as the devaluation of the dollar and rising costs in general. Action must be taken to avoid further undermining the Department's ability to deliver the message of the Organization. The Department should also proceed cautiously in rationalizing the network of United Nations information centres, a process which should be undertaken as a strategic move and not a cost-cutting exercise. As Chairman of the Committee on Information, he would continue to act as a bridge between the Department and Member States in order to reach consensus on the goals set and on the directions to be taken.

22. **Mr. Al-Nasser** (Qatar), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that DPI was the only department of the Secretariat entrusted with the important task of being the public voice of the Organization; it should therefore focus on strategically communicating the activities and concerns of the Organization in order to bring it closer to the people of the world. The Department had been guided in that task by its new mission statement and communication strategy and by the organization of its activities within four subprogrammes. The reorientation exercise launched in 2002 for enhancing the performance and effectiveness of the Department should be continued. The challenge facing the Department was not only to ensure wider outreach but also to contribute to the realization of the goals and objectives set out in the Millennium Declaration and the medium-term plan. It should promote in particular priority development issues such as poverty eradication, sustainable development, HIV/AIDS, dialogue among civilizations and cultures and the needs of African countries, as well as preventing and combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. More information regarding such activities would be welcome.

23. Member States, including many from the Group of 77 and China, were strongly committed to peacekeeping operations and had even suffered losses in pursuing the noble goals of international peace. It was therefore important to close the information gap which existed between the new realities and successes of peacekeeping operations and public perception; that would be one way of realizing the United Nations goals and objectives and should be an objective of DPI.

24. With regard to rationalization of the United Nations information centres, the Group of 77 and China remained committed to strengthening the information system, especially in developing countries. The process of establishing the regional United Nations Information Centre in Brussels was not yet complete, and it was too early to decide whether a similar process was warranted for other regions. Any further regionalization should be undertaken on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the Member States concerned, in accordance with the recommendations of the Committee on Information. Given the differences in ICT between Western Europe and other regions of the world, especially the developing countries, great

caution should be exercised when contemplating the extension of the regionalization process.

25. The lack of funding to support the core functions of the United Nations information centres, which had hindered their ability to sustain regular activities and provide for multilingualism, was a source of concern. He therefore welcomed improvements in the United Nations web sites in all official languages and stressed the need to achieve equal treatment of all languages on United Nations web sites. To that end, more resources should be allocated, taking into account the specificity of some official languages which used non-Latin and bidirectional scripts. He also reaffirmed paragraph 42 of General Assembly resolution 58/270, which requested the Secretary-General to continue to strengthen the United Nations web site through further redeployment to the required language posts.

26. Given the importance of traditional means of communication such as radio, in particular in remote areas in developing countries, it was also important to preserve and consolidate such services, which were often the only means of reaching large numbers of people. The Group of 77 therefore expressed its appreciation to the United Nations radio staff for their daily work in conveying the message of the Organization to the people in the latter's own languages.

27. **Mr. Gerts** (Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the candidate countries Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Turkey, and the countries of the stabilization and association process and potential candidates, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro, acknowledged the central role played by DPI in increasing awareness of the United Nations and its work. The European Union fully supported the Department in achieving that goal and therefore welcomed the restructuring of the Department; the creation of three separate divisions enabled it to work in a more efficient, effective and modern manner.

28. Noting the consolidation of nine information centres in Western Europe into one Regional United Nations Information Centre in Brussels, he said that Centre, though still in its early stages, would eventually provide valuable information and documentation and work with Governments, civil society and non-governmental organizations. The Centre was the first of many in the regionalization process, which would in the long run reduce costs and increase the efficiency of information services. The European Union therefore reiterated its strong support for that concept, hoping that the lessons learned in Europe would be useful in implementing the rationalization process in other regions.

29. The European Union welcomed the efforts of the Department to enhance multilingualism; the United Nations news centre web site was increasingly accessible in languages other than English and 53 of the United Nations information centres around the world currently had web sites in their local languages. The extensive improvements to the United Nations web site made it possible to log on to the web site from anywhere in the world and follow the daily work of the Organization or international issues which were not always adequately covered by the media. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library was also a valuable source of information on a wide range of topics, not only for delegates but also for anyone around the world. Those resources contributed to improved understanding of the role of the Organization by offering extended coverage of various topics, including peacekeeping operations regarding which there was clearly a considerable gap between public perception and reality. DPI would continue to play the main role in providing such crucial information.

30. Although the Internet was growing fast and could be useful in spreading the Organization's message, it should not be forgotten that whereas in North America and Europe 68 per cent and 31 per cent of the population respectively had Internet access, in Asia and Africa the corresponding figures were only 6.5 per cent and 1.4 per cent respectively. Developed countries had a responsibility to prevent nations from falling behind on the technological highway and, in that context, he recalled the upcoming Tunis phase of the World Summit on the Information Society in 2005. In areas of the world where technological development still had a long way to go, however, radio broadcasting remained the most cost-effective and far-reaching medium. It was therefore important that the Department of Public Information continue to use all media in spreading the message of the Organization.

31. The European Union underscored its commitment to freedom of expression and regretted that in too many countries freedom of expression was still a distant prospect despite being a universal and fundamental human right. It condemned any attempt by the

authorities to control and influence the media and stressed that freedom of the press was fundamental for any society. Unfortunately, too many journalists still faced incredible challenges in trying to do their work. The European Union had the profoundest respect and admiration for journalists who put their lives at risk on a daily basis in order to provide the public with reliable information and honoured the memory of those who had sacrificed their lives for that purpose.

32. *Mr. Calderón (Ecuador), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

33. **Mr. Maleki** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the special needs of developing countries in the field of ICT must be taken into account before any programme that might jeopardize their economic and social development was implemented. Unfortunately, the disparities between developed and developing countries in that area were increasing, and certain countries were taking advantage of the situation to encroach on the sovereignty and interests of other countries or distort the realities of developing nations. Assistance for the development of communication infrastructure and capabilities in developing countries must be stepped up in order to reduce discrepancies in information flows.

34. Turning to the issue of regionalization, he stressed the need to avoid any misunderstanding or hasty decision that might negatively affect the functioning of DPI, particularly its outreach services. In that connection, the closure of United Nations information centres would diminish even further the amount of information about the United Nations available to the populations of the countries affected. DPI also had a crucial role to play in combating biased information propagated by the media monopolies. He expressed his delegation's appreciation for the Department's annual training programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries and the hope that all developing countries would be able to benefit from it equally. In conclusion, he encouraged the Department to allocate resources and technical facilities to developing and expanding web pages and/or radio programmes in local languages, and to strengthen its activities in areas of special interest to developing countries.

35. **Mr. Al-Nuaimi** (United Arab Emirates) called for a comprehensive and effective strategy to develop information structures and systems, train human resources and broadcast information and public programmes free of charge in developing countries with a view to enhancing their integration in international development programmes. In that context, his delegation was concerned about attempts by Western media, particularly in the wake of 11 September 2001, to fuel feelings of hatred and racial discrimination against certain developing countries, including Islamic nations. The Western media must develop an international code of conduct for information and communications that guaranteed credibility and transparency and used existing channels of information to promote public outreach programmes on development, strengthen integration among peoples and enhance mutual respect for diverse cultures and religious beliefs.

36. The United Arab Emirates supported the initiatives by DPI to narrow the digital divide between the developing and developed nations, disseminate information on key economic, social, environmental and health issues and publicize a number of the political and security issues being considered by the United Nations, including the termination of foreign occupation, disarmament, counter-terrorism and human rights. It also stressed the importance of enhancing cooperation and coordination between DPI and other United Nations agencies and programmes.

37. He urged DPI to consider the impact of closing and merging some of its regional offices, particularly on the suffering Palestinian population. The Department should develop the skills and abilities of its staff, including the staff of its regional offices, and expand its broadcast network services. His delegation hoped that Arabic language services would be provided at a level comparable to that of other official languages of the United Nations, including increased coverage on the United Nations radio and television, and in the Library and Treaty Section. It also called on the Department to increase the number of workshops, interactive seminars, briefings and training courses offered to broadcasters and journalists from developing and poor countries and to work in partnership with regional development programmes combating poverty, environmental deterioration, HIV/AIDS and illiteracy, promoting women's and children's rights and developing human settlements.

38. **Mr. Zhanibekov** (Kazakhstan) supported the efforts of DPI to strengthen the United Nations public information system and to step up public information

activities in every region of the world, including the Commonwealth of Independent States. It hoped that the reorientation of the Department's priorities, structures and processes would be favourably received by the public at large.

39. His delegation supported the consolidation of the United Nations information centres into "regional hubs" in order to streamline the Department's advocacy efforts. In that connection, it called for more extensive coverage of the problem of the Aral Sea and the dire humanitarian consequences of years of nuclear testing at the former Semipalatinsk nuclear testing ground. Continued degradation of the environment in the Aral Sea region not only had a serious impact on the health and livelihood of its population, but had also acquired global dimensions. The salt from its seabed had long been present in the air in Europe and Asia and even over the North Pole. Unfortunately, however, the international community was not fully aware of the serious ramifications of that environmental disaster, and the provision of technical assistance and financial aid had been sporadic.

40. He urged the international community to resume its cooperation in seeking solutions to the social and economic problems of the populations near the former testing ground, which had been exposed to some 500 nuclear-weapons tests conducted by the former Soviet Union at the height of the global arms race. While his delegation was grateful to the Governments of Japan and the United States and to other donors for their assistance, it believed that the problem could be more effectively addressed by multilateral cooperation. The framework for such cooperation already existed in the form of a General Assembly resolution whose potential had not yet been fully exploited.

41. Kazakhstan was expanding its information sector under a special government programme to develop a national information infrastructure. Under the programme, cutting-edge information technologies, computer hardware and telecommunications were being introduced. An official government web site had been in operation since 2003, and work was under way on common databases, known as "legal entities" and "resources of Kazakhstan", and an electronic archiving system for State institutions. At the same time, steps were being taken to develop a regulatory framework for electronic document management and the use of electronic signatures on the basis of internationally accepted legal norms. Introduction of a unified system of electronic document management in State institutions was planned for 2005.

42. **Mr. Chun** Yung-woo (Republic of Korea) said that bridging the growing information gap between countries whose native language was one of the six official languages of the United Nations and the rest of the world was more urgent than achieving parity among the six official languages on the United Nations web site. Although the Republic of Korea was the eleventh largest financial contributor to the United Nations budget, 75 million Korean people around the world were among the most disadvantaged in terms of their opportunities to access information on the Organization's activities. In that context, his delegation welcomed the rationalization of the United Nations information centres in Western Europe and in developed countries where the Internet was the most widely used means of searching for information and/or one of the six official languages was spoken. At the same time, however, rationalization must be aimed at strengthening the Organization's information outreach to other countries that did not fall into either of those categories.

43. Traditional means of communication as well should focus greater attention on populations that did not speak one of the official United Nations languages. In that connection, his delegation was pleased to note the weekly broadcasts by the United Nations radio in eight non-official languages. Nonetheless, objective and sensible criteria for the selection of languages used in radio programmes had yet to be established.

44. His delegation welcomed the significant progress achieved by DPI in its utilization of the Internet, the most cost-effective way to deliver information on United Nations activities to the widest possible audience. It supported the Department's efforts to improve the language capacity, webcasting and searchability of the United Nations web site and stressed the need for timely and useful content. With regard to parity among the official United Nations languages on the United Nations web site, he advocated relative parity based on level of demand over absolute parity. It made more sense to invest heavily in frequently accessed web sites than to increase services on web sites for which demand was not as great.

45. **Mr. Hannesson** (Iceland) said that his country was honoured to be a new member of the Committee

on Information and looked forward to participating in its work. Iceland supported the new operating model and organizational structure of DPI. Already, his Government had increased support for the United Nations Association in Iceland and its information activities. Stressing the paramount importance of reaching out to more of the world's peoples and communicating with future generations, he urged the international community to address the digital divide between the haves and the have-nots, and the "knows" and the "know-nots", and welcomed the support provided by DPI to such educational programmes as the Model United Nations and the United Nations Cyberschoolbus. In conclusion, he announced that a Model United Nations meeting would be held in Iceland that very weekend.

46. **Mr. Kafando** (Burkina Faso) observed that the reforms of the past few years were not an end in themselves but were meant to produce an Organization that effectively served peace, security and development. Thus, the restructured and redirected DPI must under no circumstances lose sight of the importance of re-establishing a worldwide balance of information which would result in information that was fairer and more effective. The Department must also not lose sight of the importance it must give to promoting the activities of the United Nations, which were often criticized and misunderstood. Nor should it disregard the fact that, at a time when new ICT was developing at a dizzying speed, millions in the developing countries, especially in Africa, depended entirely on the United Nations to learn about the world beyond their borders. The heavy use made of the United Nations information centres in African countries was sufficient proof, and the Department should proceed with caution in restructuring them. Needless to say, the States involved must be consulted, and the local, subregional and regional particularities and the specific role of each centre must be taken into account. The Burkina Faso Information Centre covered Mali, the Niger and Chad as well and had become a showcase for the United Nations in the region in general, having developed also a mutually beneficial partnership with the government authorities and civil society, and having become a genuine research centre for teachers, pupils and government experts. His Government intended to continue to work with the information centre to achieve the high objectives of the United Nations system.

47. **Mr. Al-Otaibi** (Kuwait) welcomed the efforts of DPI to make good the information gap between the developed and the developing countries, to inform the world of United Nations activities in the political, economic, social and intellectual areas, and to keep pace with the rapid changes in recent years in information and communications as a result of technological progress.

48. It was necessary to ensure a free and balanced flow of information, using information not in order to impose hegemony or to promote any particular culture or ideology but rather as a medium for dialogue and communication between peoples. Efforts were needed to close the digital divide in information technology between developed and developing countries so that all might benefit from the information revolution. His delegation called on DPI to redouble its efforts to assist the developing countries to strengthen their information infrastructure and institutions. The Department should also continue its efforts to highlight developments in the Palestinian issue and to give the matter due importance as required by the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly. Equal use should be made of all the official languages of the United Nations, including Arabic, in the activities of the Department. All Member States should pay their contributions in full and on time in order to ensure that the Organization's activities and programmes were not adversely affected by a shortage of funds.

49. His country believed that an essential factor in the success of the information activities of the United Nations lay in promoting partnerships between the Organization and information institutions, both governmental and non-governmental, in the Member States and in cooperation between them through joint programmes to make the activities of the United Nations better known and mobilize the necessary support for them. On that basis, his country had supported a number of DPI publications and bulletins on matters of basic concern to the United Nations. His country had also taken the initiative of asking to organize the annual concert customarily given on the occasion of United Nations Day in recognition of the outstanding role played by the Organization in various fields. He commended the cooperation and coordination that had been established with the Department to alleviate any problems in the Organization of that event that would take place on 25 October 2004.

50. His country supported the efforts made by the United Nations to coordinate and consolidate its activities in order to achieve maximum effectiveness. In that context, Kuwait has donated a plot of land and earmarked a sum of $5,340,000 for the construction of a United Nations building to provide office space for all the agencies of the United Nations working in Kuwait. Work was expected to begin on the construction of the building the following month. It was hoped that that initiative would facilitate United Nations activities both in Kuwait and in other countries in the region.

51. In conclusion, he reaffirmed his country's commitment to the efforts to ensure greater information and press freedom in keeping with the traditions of society and its Arab and Islamic values and pledged his country's cooperation with the United Nations and its specialized agencies to achieve their objectives.

52. **Mr. Song** Se Il (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that the rapid development of information technology affected every aspect of life. Information was important for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the Implementation of the agreements reached at the World Summit on the Information Society. It must never be misused to infringe the sovereignty of another country or interfere in its internal affairs. Such encroachment upon developing countries by some nations with exclusive control over advanced information technology should no longer be tolerated. Such nations used information for their own political purposes, pouring funds and human resources into psychological warfare in order to impose their own ideological and cultural values upon others. Member States must exert every effort to make information an instrument for understanding and cooperation among nations and to ensure international stability and sustainable development. Information should contribute to the well-being of all humankind. Only then could its fairness, objectivity and accuracy be guaranteed.

53. International assistance in improving the information infrastructure of the developing countries through the training of experts, the transfer of technology and the provision of equipment would allow them to enjoy the benefits of the latest ICT. His delegation urged DPI to pursue its commendable efforts to strengthen the national information capacity of developing countries.

54. **Mr. Khomenko** (Ukraine), welcoming the restructuring of DPI and the reorganization of its activities, underlined the importance of its strategic communications service in consolidating peacekeeping and peacebuilding. It was useful for the Department to publicize new activities in that area, particularly in Africa. The Department's strategic activities would continue to be central in drawing attention to issues of global concern such as terrorism, conflict prevention, sustainable development, HIV/AIDS and environmental problems.

55. The United Nations information centres were very important in maintaining direct contacts between the United Nations and local communities. In Ukraine, the information component of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office had proved highly effective in giving a picture of the United Nations and its major areas of activity. His Government was ready to support the integration of United Nations information centres into UNDP field offices, particularly in countries with economies in transition, in the interests of greater coordination, effectiveness and economy.

56. With regard to the news services, the Department was to be commended for continuing to update the United Nations web site, while respecting the principle of parity for all official languages, and to make it more informative, functional and visually attractive. The redesigned United Nations News Centre was an excellent source of news on the latest developments in the system and also a gateway to a wide array of links to news resources. The e-mail news service was also a welcome addition that gave journalists, researchers and the public at large quick access to the latest United Nations news.

57. His delegation supported the efforts to achieve a more modern, highly integrated and efficient library system within the United Nations. Collaborative reference services and the sharing of collections and resources would ensure immediate electronic access to the wealth of global information made available by the Organization.

The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.